



Crews fight Wyoming blizzard

by **Dave Christy**

Western crews from four states pitched in to restore power to the town of Lusk, Wyo., and the rural area darkened by an early October blizzard.

Numerous Western employees, from dispatchers to linemen, worked long hours to restore power to the town of 1,500 and surrounding area after the storm took down lines belonging to Western and the local utilities.

Rocky Mountain Region maintenance crews from Wyoming, Colorado and Nebraska mobilized to help rebuild the line, joined by an Upper Great Plains Region crew from Rapid City, S.D. In addition to personnel, Western supplied front-end loaders, bucket trucks, bulldozers and other equipment, including two helicopters, for the project. Western even supplied a generator to provide power for the office of Niobrara Electric Association, the utility serving the area outside Lusk.

"We had to move a lot of people quickly," said **Ray Forbes**, maintenance manager for the RM Wyoming-Nebraska Division.

The lines were brought down by a buildup of ice 8 inches in diameter on the wires, combined with 60-mph winds, he said. Western's 115-kV line had 12 H-structures and one three-pole structure that required replacement.

The storm started late Oct. 4 and lasted through the afternoon of Oct. 5, said **Nancy Bellows**, RM supervisory dispatcher. In addition to their regular workload, dispatchers worked to assist the affected areas. "I really have to give kudos to the guys on the desk," she said, "They made calls to arrange for assistance and developed switching procedures to bring substations back on line."

Western's 115-kV lines tripped at

4:15 a.m. on Oct. 5 and Forbes was called out a few minutes later. He gathered a line crew and headed for Lusk from Western's Casper office. "There was a terrible blizzard between Casper and Lusk," he said. "Visibility at that time was probably 20 yards."

The 115-kV line had gone down across the highway to Lusk, so the line crew had to ground the line and clear it from the road, which was covered with ice and deep slush.

Snow cats were needed to survey the line and find out the extent of the damage. Crews equipment moved to Lusk on Oct. 5, and a meeting was held early the next morning to finalize work plans. With 26 people on different crews and numerous pieces of heavy equipment on the job, safety was a key consideration. Meetings were held each morning to plan the day's work. "We had no equipment breakdowns and no injuries to anyone," Forbes said.

Although the storm had blown over by Oct. 6, the mud left by snow and rain complicated the work. Trucks had to be pulled into position through the mud to work on the line. Western helicopters were based at Lusk and Loveland to move people and materials. Two days later the Western 115-kV line was back in service, so Western crews began assisting the local utilities with repairs.

Western lines crews helped Tri-State Generation & Transmission rebuild two 69-kV lines that serve Niobrara. Western substation crews checked transformers for Lusk and Niobrara, and helped Niobrara operate a substation during the outage and re-energize it.

Although it required 12-hour days by Western employees to get the lights back on, Forbes is proud of the work they did. "This is an example of how people can